

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00050 01 OF 02 071605Z

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INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 QUEBEC 0050

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: SEVENTY-FIVE DAYS OF PQ GOVERNMENT:

REF: QUEBEC 0031

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: SEVENTY-FIVE DAYS AFTER ELECTION OF PARTI QUEBECOIS GOVERNMENT, PRE-REFERENDUM STRATEGIES OF TWO MAIN PROTAGONISTS ON QUEBEC SCENE ARE BEGINNING TO BE DEFINED. GOQ IS ATTEMPTING BOTH TO PROVIDE GOOD GOVERNMENT FOR THE PROVINCE AND BALANCE THE INTERESTS OF ITS COMPLETING CONSTITUENCIES (REFTEL) IN EFFORT CREATE WIDE BASE OF SUPPORT. IN LAST FEW WEEKS, GOQ HAS ADOPTED POSTURE OF FISCAL CONSERVATISM TO PLEASE BUSINESS COMMUNITIES AT SOME TIME THAT IT STRESSED IT INDEPENDENCE GOOD AND ANNOUNCED NEW SOCIAL WELFARE GOALS TO PLEASE LESS MODERATE MEMBERS OF PARTY. LATTER INCLUDE SOME BOCK-BENCHERS ALREADY FRUSTRATED AT BEING EXCLUDED FROM INNER CIRCLES OF POWER. MEANWHILE, LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA (QUEBEC SECTION) HAS ANNOUNCED A CAMPAIGN AGAINST SEPARATISM DESIGNED TO LAST FROM IMPENDING BYELECTIONS TO EVENTUAL REFERENDUM. MAJOR SPEECHES LAST WEEK BY LEVESQUE AND TRUDEAN WERE OPENING SHOTS OF UNFOLDING

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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00050 01 OF 02 071605Z

CAMPAIGN. SO FAR, ALL OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES APPEAR TO BE OBSERVERS RATHER THAN PROTAGONISTS. END SUMMARY.

2.LAST WEEK'S MAJOR SPEECHES BY PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU IN QUEBEC AND PRIMIER LEVESQUE IN NEW YORK CAPPED A PERIOD OF SEVERAL WEEKS IN WHICH PRE-REFERENDUM STRATEGIES OF TWO MAIN PROTAGONISTS BEGAN TO BE DEFINED. WHILE CONCENTRATING TECHNICALLY

ON PREPARING A BUDGET AND THE OPENING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON MARCH 8, GOQ IS ATTEMPTING POLITICALLY TO KEEP ITS THREE MAJOR CONSTITUENCIES (REFTEL) IN BALANCE UNTIL REFERENDUM IS DUE. FEDERAL LIBERALS IN QUEBEC FOR THEIR PART, HAVE LAUNCHED A CAMPAIGN TO COUNTER SEPARATION BY REKINDLING THE NOTION OF NATIONAL UNITY IN EVERY CORNER OF THE PROVINCE. LIBERALS VIEW COMING BY ELECTIONS AS FIRST STEP IN THIS DRIVE AND ARE CALLING IT A MINI-REFERENDUM. PROVINCIAL OPPOSITION LIBERAL AND UNION NATIONAL PARTIES AS WELL AS FEDERAL OPPOSITION CONSERVATIVES AND NDP APPEAR TO BE IN DISARRAY IN QUEBEC AND, AS A RESULT, COULD PLAY ONLY A MINOR ROLE, IN IMPENDING BATTLE.

3. IN ATTEMPT TO PLAY TO BUSINESS ELEMENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD WHOSE DECISIONS WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN QUEBEC AND INFLUENCE REFERENDUM VOTES OF BROAD-BASED FRANCOPHONE MIDDLE CLASS, GOQ HAS STRUCK A POSTURE OF FISCAL CONSERVATISM. THIS WAS EVIDENT IN THE ECONOMIC SECTIONS OF LEVESQUE'S SPEECH. LEVESQUE AND HIS MINISTER CAREFULLY BEGAN PREPARING QUEBECOIS - WHATEVER THEN POLITICAL PERSUASION - FOR NEW YORK MESSAGE, EVEN BEFORE HE TRIES LEVESQUE TOLD 800 UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL STUDENTS ON JANUARY 17 THAT PROVINCE MUST LEARN TO LIVE WITHIN ITS ECONOMIC MEANS. HE CONTINUED SAME LINE IN JANUARY 19 PRESS CONFERENCE WHEN HE ADDED QUEBECORS MUST TIGHTEN THEIR BELTS AS GOQ DOES NOT HAVE EITHER TIME OR NECESSARY CREDITS TO LOWER IMMEDIATELY THE ALARMING RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT WHICH COULD IN HIS VIEW - SOON RISE TO 11-12 PERCENT. MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE RODRIQUE TREMBLY CARRIED CAMPAIGN FOR FISCAL INTEGRITY TO MONTREAL STAR INTERVIEW JANUARY 20, STATING PQ WILL ASSURE MONETARY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00050 01 OF 02 071605Z

STABILITY BEFORE HOLDING A REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE - HE ADDED QUEBEC'S CURRENCY WOULD REMAIN CANADIAN DOLLAR FOR SEVERAL YEARS AFTER ANY PQ REFERENDUM VICTORY.

4. LEVESQUE'S STRESS ON INDEPENDENCE IN NEW YORK SPEECH HAD EFFECT OF REASSURING RADICALS IN PQ ABOUT EVENTUAL GOAL OF PARTIES EVEN WHILE ANNOUNCING FISCAL RESTRAINT WHICH ELEMENTS IN LEFT OF PQ FINDS GALLING. (PERHAPS ANOTHER BONE TOSSED THEIR WAY WAS SERIES OF ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR INCREASED MEDICAL, DENTAL CARE, AND OTHER SOCIAL WELFARE MEASURES. AS WE REPORTED IN REFTEL, PQ IS MORE OF A MOVEMENT THAN CONVENTIONAL PARTY AND ALL ELEMENTS WILL HAVE TO BE SOMEWHAT APPEASED. OPEN NATURE OF PARTY WAS EVIDENT AT RECENT MEETING OF PQ BACKBENCHERS. ALREADY FRUSTRATED AT BEING EXCLUDED FROM INNER CIRCLES OF POWER, THEY ASKED PROVINCIAL CABINET FOR A GREATER ROLE IN GOVERNMENT PLANNING. ONLY A MAJOR EFFORT BY ENTIRE CABINET TO MANIFEST ITS CONCERN FOR BACKBENCHERS CALMED DOWN MINI-REVOLT.

5. A KEY ELEMENT IN LEVESQUE'S APPROACH IS PROVIDING GOOD GOVERNMENT FOR QUEBEC. IN SPITE OF RECENT POLICE STRIKE IN MONTREAL, HE APPEARS IN VERY SHORT TERM TO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN HIS STRATEGY TO TRANQUILIZE QUEBEC LABOR MOVEMENT (SEE QUEBEC 0026) AND CREATED BETTER SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT. HIS PROGRAM FOR COMING SESSION WILL BE ANNOUNCED DURING MARCH 8 THRONE SPEECH. IT WILL GIVE QUEBECOIS FIRST GOOD INDICATION OF WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT FROM PQ GOVERNMENT . TO FULFILL ANOTHER OF HIS PROMISES, LEVESQUE ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAS STARTED PREPARATIONS FOR THE PROMISED REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE, NO DATE HAS BEEN SET AS PREMIER ONLY REPEATED THAT IT WOULD COME DURING GOVERNMENT'S GIVE YEAR MANDATE. IN A GALLOP POLL RELEASED FEBRUARY 2, PREMIER ENJOYS A 73 034PERCENT FAVORABLE OPINION, QP PERCENT UNFAVORABLE RATING AS OF EARLY JANUARY. HIS PROBLEM WILL BE TO MAINTAIN THIS HIGH RATING AS CONFLICTING PRIORITIES OF HIS THREE MAIN CONSTITUENCIES AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 QUEBEC 00050 01 OF 02 071605Z

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNING COMPLICATE CHOICES AND ANTAGONIZE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY.

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00050 02 OF 02 071616Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 QUEBEC 0050

6. IN JANUARY 22 MONTREAL MEETING, FEDERAL LIBERALS

GIRDED FOR CAMPAIGN AGAINST SEPARATISM. LED BY URBAN AFFAIRS MINISTER ANDRE QUELLET - NEWLY DESIGNATED CHIEF ELECTORAL ORGANIZER FOR QUEBEC, LIBERALS DECIDED CAMPAIGN'S SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVE WOULD BE TO ASSURE LIBERAL VICTORIES IN FIVE QUEBEC BY-ELECTIONS DUE THIS SPRING. THIS IS DESIGNED TO PAVE WAY FOR RESOUNDING VICTORY IN GENERAL ELECTION EXPECTED NEXT YEAR. THE LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE IS TO BRING ANTI-SEPARATIST CAMPAIGN TO A PEAK AT THE SAME TIME AS THE PARTI QUEBECOIS PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT HOLDS ITS REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE. QUELLET IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT CAMPAIGN WILL SELL A NOBLE CAUSE - NATIONAL UNITY - AND THAT THEREFORE IT SHOULD BE RELATIVELY EASY. TRUDEAU CLEARLY BEGAN THE EFFORT IN HIS QUEBEC SPEECH BUT IT COULD PROVE TO BE MUCH HARDER THAN QUELLET ANTICIPATED

7. LEVESQUE AND TRUDEAU ALONG WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTY MACHINES ARE DOMINATING SCENE AS OTHER POLITICAL FORMATIONS - PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL - ARE STILL LOOKING FOR AROLE TO PLAY. PC IS STILL STRUGGLING ON QUEBEC LEVEL. IT HAS ONLY BEEN ABLE TO MAKE FEEBLE PROTEST AGAINST LIBERAL PLANS TO DUB BY ELECTIONS A MINI -REFERENDUM: CONSERVATIVES NOTED THAT TRUDEAU-NOT LEVESQUE-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00050 02 OF 02 071616Z

WOULD BE TARGET OF PC CAMPAIGN-NDP, OF COURSE, HAS NEVER BEEN IMPORTANT FACTOR ON PROVINCIAL SCENE. THE PROVINCIAL LIBERAL PARTY IS IN A COMPLETE STATE OF DISARRAY FOLLOWING ITS NOVEMBER 15 DEFEAT. INTERIM LEADER GERARD D. LEVESQUE HAS ANNOUNCED THAT PARTY WILL HOLD LEADERSHIP CONVENTION ONLY NEXT YEAR AFTER A BASIC PARTY PLATFORM IS DEVELOPED. MEANWHILE, SKIRMISHING HAS DEVELOPED BETWEEN SEVERAL DEFEATED PROVINCIAL MINISTERS AND LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENT BEN PAYUR. LATTER IS A TECHNICAN WHO WAS QUITE ADEQUATE WHEN PARTY WAS IN POWER BUT IS NOT OF STATURE NEEDED TO LEAD PARTY'S RE-CONSTRUCTION. THUS HE MAY SOON BE OUT. WHILE LIBERALS ARE RE-BUILDING UNION NATIONALS IS STILL BUILDING. IT HAS SHOWN NO CLEAR INDICATION OF HOW IT WILL APPROACH EVENTUAL REFERENDUM.

8. COMMENT: MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THAT FEDERAL LIBERAL PARTY COULD BE MAKING A SERIOUS MISTAKE IN ATTEMPTING TURN BY ELECTIONS INTO MINI-REFERENDUM. WHILE TACTIC HAS LEFT PC FULMINATING IN FOR THE MOMENT, IT COULD WORK AGAINST LIBERALS IF OPPOSITION CAN TURN IT INTO A MINI REFERENDUM ON TRUDEAU'S STEWARDSHIP. FURTHERMORE, IT DEFLECTS FEDERAL LIBERALS FROM GIVING SERIOUS THOUGHTS TO ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS - CONSTITUTIONAL OR OTHERWISE - TO "QUEBEC PROBLEM". THIS LOCKS LIBERALS INTO INTRANSIGENT POSITION. IF THIS SITUATION PERSISTS,) PROVINCIAL LIBERALS MAY HAVE TO FACTOR MUCH LOOSER TIES WITH FEDERAL PARTY INTO THEIR RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS. AS IT STANDS NOW, FEDERAL LIBERAL CONTINUE TO BE ALBATROS AROUND NECKS OF PROVINCIAL LIBERAL. THERE HAS NOT YET BEEN A REAL ATTEMPT MADE, AS THERE SHOULD BE BEFORE REFERENDUM, TO RETHINK CANADIAN

FEDERATION AND MAKE ROOM FOR NEW DIMENSION WHICH HAS APPEARED IN QUEBEC OVER LAST 15 YEARS. IF LIBERAL STRATEGY SUCCEEDS IN REELECTING LIBERALS AND DEFEATING INDEPENDENCE IN A REFERENDUM, IT WILL STILL NOT BE THE END OF THE SUBJECT AS TRUDEAU WOULD LIKE. FOR, AS CLAUDE RYAN OF LE DEVOIR HAS SAID, A VOTE BY QUEBECOIS TO REMAIN WITH CONFEDERATION WILL ONLY PERPETUATE INSTABILITY AND UNREST IN QUEBEC. "IN RYAN'S VIEW, ONLY THE FIRST INNING OF THE BALL GAME WILL HAVE BEEN PLAYED." IF SO, WHAT WE HAVE SEEN IN THE LAST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00050 02 OF 02 071616Z

SEVERAL WEEKS IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPENING DAY STRATEGIES.
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